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SUBJECT: ESTABLISHMENT OF SUDANESE-AMERICAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION IN
KHARTOUM

¶1. SUMMARY: For a number of years, Sudanese alumni of USG grant programs tried, but never quite succeeded, in forming an alumni association. This has now changed. In late February, the semi-governmental Council for International People's Friendship approved the 27-member Sudanese American Alumni Association steering committee's draft charter. Less than a month later, the alumni association's executive board has infused new impetus into the Sudanese American Friendship Association (SAFA) by insisting on identifying "areas of cooperation" between the two entities. END SUMMARY

¶2. A principal goal of the new alumni association, as articulated by the Association's Secretary General, "Al-Sudani" daily columnist Sulaiman Alamin Abbas Ali, is "changing the stereotypes about America in Sudan and those of Sudan prevalent in America." From the outset, the Alumni Association has had to battle efforts by the Council for International People's Friendship not to become absorbed by the heavily business-centered Sudanese American Friendship Association. At the earliest stage of negotiations, the Council informed the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) that coming under the Friendship Association's aegis would be a precondition for the Alumni Association to have recognition by the Council. An additional stipulation was that the Alumni Association include as members graduates of any U.S. university, whatever the funding source. These preconditions were likely due to the existing association's inability to draw outside participation for its activities. The PAO and alumni alike went to great lengths to explain the uniqueness of the USG grantee alumni community and how certain benefits, such as grant opportunities, were only available to those who were part of the State Department global alumni network. The Council finally agreed to these caveats in admitting the Alumni Association fell under its umbrella.

¶3. When members of the Sudanese American Friendship Association saw positive media coverage of the Association's founding, its Friendship group's executive board contacted their alumni counterparts to seek a stake in the renewed momentum, if not a claim to the territory of bilateral friendship. Alumni Association president, Ahfad University for Women Professor Dr. Abdelmoniem Badri, artfully avoided the potential turf war by telling the press: "We need the United States and the United States needs us." He traced the exchange process back to Sudan's pre-independence period, and called the ties with the U.S. "no less than the table tennis tournaments that brought the U.S. and China together. As an educator, bringing back English-language programs is a top priority and should be one of the roles of the Alumni Association."

¶4. Professor Ahmed El-Amin Al-Bashir, Chairman of the American and European Department of the Council for International People's Friendship, qualified his relationship with the United States as "wide" and "deep": "First, in 1967 I was appointed as Third *Secretary* to the Embassy of Sudan in the United States. The second aspect of my relationship with the U.S. is that my wife is American, and my son works for The Washington Post ..." He referred to the "large number of Sudanese living in the U.S. -- more than quarter of

a million -- so we are working on very solid ground."

15. On March 18 the SAFA Board invited CDA Fernandez to a dinner at SAFA Chair's Amin al-Nefeidi's palatial estate to explain the latest on U.S. foreign policy in Sudan. On March 24 the Friendship Association Chairman and selected executive members invited the PAO (as "facilitator of the dialogue,") and four members of the Alumni Association executive committee to discuss how they might explore "overlapping objectives." According to the Alumni Association charter, areas in which common goals meet include "development and consolidation of friendly relations, cooperation, and ... understanding between Sudanese and Americans," contributing to "cooperation and exchanges in all fields," and seeking a meeting point between Sudanese and American peoples "in terms of their cultures, arts and contribution to civilization and human heritage."

COMMENT: The formation of the Sudanese American Alumni Association during a period of mounting anti-U.S. rhetoric in the lead-up to the International Criminal Court's March 4 issuance of an arrest warrant against Sudanese President Bashir is both a significant and encouraging sign. Positive media coverage of the Association's formation also indicates receptivity to strengthening bilateral educational ties during a time of heightened political tension following the ICC warrant and the expulsion by the Government of Sudan of 13 international NGOs doing vital humanitarian work in Darfur. With the support of the Public Affairs Section (PAS), the Association is seeking to locate the appx. 600-700 alumni who have been on USG exchange programs from Sudan. The Mission will collaborate with the alumni organization in co-sponsoring seminars, lectures, commemorative events, cultural/ artistic and other activities.

KHARTOUM

FERNANDEZ